

*Dr. Tys  
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R E M A R K S

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L E T T E R, &c.



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L E T T E R

T O

Sir ROBERT BARKER, Knight, F.R.S.

A N D

GEORGE STACPOOLE, Esquire,

U P O N

GENERAL INOCULATION,

B Y

JOHN COAKLEY LETTSOM, M.D. F.R.S. and S.A.

B Y T H E

HON<sup>BLE</sup> BARON T. DIMSDALE,

First Physician and Actual Counsellor of State to her  
Imperial Majesty the Empress of all the Russias,  
and F. R. S.

L O N D O N.

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M.DCC.LXXIX.



## A D V E R T I S E M E N T.

**I**N compliance with the request of some friends, to whose opinions I pay great deference, the following Remarks on Dr. Lettsom's letter to Sir Robert Barker, and George Stacpoole, Esq. are reluctantly published.

It is undoubtedly a matter of great consequence, to determine whether the Inoculation of a small number of the poor in this great city, without the consent of their neighbours, be a practice deserving encouragement, as the physicians of this pretended charity have advanced ; or whether this mode of practice does not endanger the lives of many unhappy persons, who may be in an ill state of health, or unwilling to submit to Inoculation, and yet unable to avoid the infection ; and also contribute to extend and continue a disease that it should be every one's care to suppress as much as possible, which is the opinion that I have supported. Yet interesting as the question certainly is, it can hardly



hardly be supposed that many will purchase and read what has been published in this controversy. Wherefore, in order to make the matter more publicly known, I have determined to present the pamphlets, which contain the opinions I have entertained on the subject, to some coffee-houses, or other places where pamphlets are deposited for publick inspection. And if the gentlemen who have written on the other side of the question, will, in the same manner, present their publications, the candid Public will be enabled to judge for themselves.

R E M A R K S

# R E M A R K S

O N A

L E T T E R, &c.

**I**N disputes on important subjects, it has been frequent matter of complaint, that assertions and arguments, which have been considered and refuted, are again introduced by new opponents, without taking notice of what has been objected, or endeavouring to throw new lights on the subject. In this case, it becomes necessary to give an answer, though it may contain little more than a repetition of what has been formerly advanced.

This apology I think myself obliged to make, on the very unpleasing occasion of  
again

again taking the pen, to make some remarks on a letter, addressed to Sir Robert Barker, and George Stacpoole Esq. by Dr. Lettsom; in which, to be as concise as possible, and to avoid entering on new matter, I shall pass over that part which relates to the Doctor's experience in the natural Small-Pox (though it does not agree with what I have observed in my own practice), and confine myself to the parts that respect General Inoculation only.

After having said that the poor seem desirous of having the blessing of Inoculation extended to their families in the same manner as the rich, the Doctor adds<sup>a</sup>,  
 “ I could not perceive any reasonable  
 “ argument in support of inoculating per-  
 “ sons of fortune at their own houses,  
 “ which might not, from the same prin-  
 “ ciples of humanity, and true policy, be  
 “ extended also to the poor.” How well

<sup>a</sup> Letter, p. 8.



this opinion has been supported by the practice of the society for General Inoculation, will best appear, by comparing the accounts they have given, with the regulations observed in inoculating persons of fortune.

<sup>b</sup> The physician to the society professes to inoculate in narrow streets, in little courts, and in the midst of those who have not had the disease; and even on ground-floors, where a number of children in the same situation continue to play during the whole course of the illness: in short, where the intercourse between the well and the sick is unavoidable, and without taking the least care to prevent the infection from spreading.

Persons of fortune, on the other hand, who inoculate at their own houses, from a just sense of the infectious nature of the disease, observe the most scrupulous

<sup>b</sup> Exam. p. 17.      Obser. p. 51, 52.

care to keep the inoculated separate from others.

After this true state of the case, whatever might be the Doctor's former opinion, I hope he will now perceive a reasonable argument, why the Inoculation practised by persons of fortune may be supported, but the mode adopted by the society among the poor, be indefensible from the principles of humanity and true policy.

Upon a former occasion it had been asserted<sup>c</sup>, that a single instance had not occurred of the contagion being spread by a patient inoculated in this charity. In answer to which, I proved<sup>d</sup>, that it was impossible to support the assertion, and extremely improbable that it could be true.

In the letter I am now considering, it is insisted<sup>e</sup>, that the medical practitioners

<sup>c</sup> Exam. p. 16.    <sup>d</sup> Obser. p. 53.    <sup>e</sup> Letter p. 9, 10.

have carefully noticed every circumstance that could operate on either side; and the result has been, that no instance occurred during the space of two years, from whence it could be inferred, that Inoculation had communicated the disease to a single person; but many, to prove that it has been the means of obviating the natural infection. No account however is given, upon what foundation the medical gentlemen have made this deduction: it must not therefore be taken for granted, and indeed I think the impossibility of supporting the assertion may be proved from the following considerations.

When a person is inoculated, we can ascertain the exact time and manner of the infection being communicated, and from whom it was taken; but we are not endued with faculties to distinguish either of these circumstances, with respect to the natural Small-Pox, which renders absolute proofs of these particulars impossible.



To apply what has been advanced, to the point in question, let it be supposed that 15 or 16000 persons have the Small-Pox yearly in London: should an inquiry be made of individuals, or their friends, at what time, or from whom, the infection was received, I am persuaded that the general answer would be, that the disease had been in the neighbourhood, but that it was impossible to account at what time, or from whom, the infection had been taken: except, indeed, where one person has the Small-Pox, and another residing in the same house, sickens of the distemper; in which case, the source of the disease may amount to a moral certainty<sup>f</sup>. And on a former occasion, I informed one of the physicians to the society, of several instances of this kind, where the disease had been undoubtedly received from inoculated patients, and even invited him to accompany me to two of those patients, who were then ill

of the small-pox in a dangerous manner. My proposal was however declined, and I received for answer, that the Doctor could not but express some degree of surprise, that I should imagine that instances of that kind should carry any convincing proof of the infectious state of inoculated patients, at a time, when an epidemic constitution of the air prevailed. If then, proofs so absolute were not convincing, though at the same time the Doctor confessed that he never entertained a doubt, but that the contagion of the Small-Pox might be propagated by Inoculation; I desire the gentlemen to desist from positive assertions that are entitled to no credit, and tell us plainly what were the circumstances they carefully noticed, and what proofs they will allow to be decisive.

<sup>§</sup> In the next paragraph Dr. L. insists, that, after inquiries made, the result has proved, that the sum of good greatly

<sup>§</sup> Letter p. 10.



exceeds the sum of evil. But here also he has rested the balance of the account, upon his own positive assertion, without mentioning the instances of good or evil that were noticed.

The answer therefore given to the former paragraph, is applicable to this. But if the physicians to this society should persist in their opinions, that the good resulting from their mode of practice, is greater than the evil, although unsupported by any other of the profession; it well deserves consideration, how far they will be justified in a mode of practice certainly dangerous to the lives of others.

Do not these gentlemen know that the constitution of this country is so tender, respecting the invasion of private property, that even a small piece of land, to widen a publick road, cannot be taken without the sanction of the legislature, or consent of the owner? Shall then the health and  
life

life of a man be esteemed of smaller account than a piece of land?

Shall a set of men, for their own private advantage, take the liberty of bringing an infectious disease in a neighbourhood, without the consent of others, who cannot avoid the danger?

On a former occasion, in reply to Dr. Watkinson, who had made the same assertion, I remarked that this mode of reasoning might deserve attention, if it regarded the disease of horned cattle, or brutes, but was shocking to humanity, where the lives of mankind were the objects<sup>h</sup>.

Instead

<sup>h</sup> My words were (Observations, p. 117.) “Can a  
 “ man be so unfeeling, as to reason coolly on the sum  
 “ of good and evil produced, where the lives of fellow-  
 “ mortals, equally precious to the poor as the rich,  
 “ are the objects?” taking it for granted, that a benevolent mind would be too much warmed by the affections of humanity, to weigh coolly the uncertain  
 benefits

Instead of retracting this sentiment, I shall now go farther; even in the case of horned cattle, if any one, from his own opinion of the good being greater than the evil, should take upon himself to inoculate cattle for hire, and suffer them to intermix with those of the neighbourhood, who disapproved the practice; I have no doubt, but in case of losses, an action would lie, and damages be recover-

benefits which might possibly arise, against the risk of life which must certainly accrue. The authors of the Monthly Review, for April last, having quoted this passage, add, that in their apprehension, “ It is the  
 “ cool consideration of this point, which alone must  
 “ direct us in every case, whether medical or politi-  
 “ cal, in which the welfare of mankind is concerned.” I believe it will be found, that I have paid proper attention to this sentiment, in what I have written; particularly in page 2 of the observations, where it will appear, that the propriety of the undertaking was recommended to the cool consideration and decision of disinterested and eminent physicians, either in or out of the college; or else, that the legislature should be applied to for its consent and countenance: all which proposals were rejected.

ed.



ed. I shall decline giving an opinion as to the crime of one, who should, in a similar manner, occasion the untimely death of a fellow-creature.

The next part of the letter proper to be noticed, is the <sup>i</sup> account given of the Inoculation at Ware, in the summer of 1777, where after about eighty persons had died of the Small-Pox, a general Inoculation was proposed, and adopted by most of the survivors, a few not chusing to submit to the expedient. Not one of these caught the infection, and after this not one died; and the infection was totally eradicated. Thus far I allow; but the following material circumstances are forgotten, and must be added to render the account complete.

A general Inoculation being agreed on, and the whole town apprised of the measure, such as were unwilling to submit

<sup>i</sup> Letter, p. 10 and 11.

to the operation, took all possible care to avoid intercourse with the infected, and the greatest attention was observed, both by the medical gentlemen concerned, and the inoculated patients, that the infection should not be communicated to their neighbours. That the infection was totally eradicated, is surely nothing wonderful. For when the whole town had been inoculated, except the few objectors, who took care to avoid the infection, there remained none in the town to take the disease.

This supplement being made, the Inoculation at Ware will be found<sup>k</sup> (like some other instances that I have formerly noticed<sup>l</sup>) to have been most unfortunately selected; because, instead of resembling the inoculations of the society that it is produced to support; it differs from their mode of practice in every essential point, and was in fact conducted exactly in the

<sup>k</sup> Letter, p. 10    <sup>l</sup> See Obser. p. 3. 49. 72. 74. 82. 92. 112.



same manner that I have earnestly recommended in my writings, have three times practised at Hertford, and several times at other places, accounts of which have been published. Innumerable Inoculations of the same kind have also been performed in different parts of England by other practitioners, to which I sincerely hope many more, and in still larger places, will be added. But I have not the least doubt that, in all, the most humane care will be taken, that those who are in an improper state of health, and those who object to the practice, may not be endangered, while others are benefited.

The Inoculation at Ware was in the summer of 1777. This last summer Dr. L. has been several times at Hertford, and once he did me the favour to call at my house for a few minutes, when he introduced the subject of the society, by saying, that their finances were very low,

and there had been thoughts of making some alterations in their manner of proceeding; but for himself, as his friends were engaged in a dispute concerning the institution, he had determined to take no part in it. I only replied, that I hoped whoever did, would keep to the point, and answer the objections that had been made, without renewing assertions that had been shewn to be ill-founded. He answered, certainly they should, for whoever neglected this, would only expose himself. No mention was made about the general Inoculation at Ware the preceding summer, although I lived within two miles of the place, and he might of course conclude that some information might have been received from me. Why therefore he neither chose at this interview, or at any other time, to make some inquiry of a person, for whom he professes so high an esteem, who he knew did not approve of the institution for General Inoculation, and who he is persuaded would

unite

unite in promoting the plan, if he was convinced of its public utility, seems somewhat mysterious. I wish however he had, as I believe a very short conversation might have prevented his publishing the letter now under consideration, and spared me the very disagreeable task of making these remarks on it.

With respect to the latter part of the letter<sup>1</sup>, so immediately respecting me, I regret very much that it was not entirely omitted. An apology for publishing his sentiments was surely unnecessary. In disputes of this kind, every one should follow the example of the gentlemen at the bar; who, notwithstanding they support a cause with great earnestness, do not retain the least resentment against their opponent. Private character had certainly nothing to do with the subject on which he treats; and indeed, I fear, to those who know the slight acquaintance

<sup>1</sup> Letter, p. 12.



subsisting between us, the concluding paragraph must appear abundantly too flattering. That mutual civilities have passed the very few times we have had occasion to meet, is true, but I do not recollect that we have spent an hour together, more than once; nor had we ever any epistolary correspondence. There must be an excessive avidity of praise, to render such lavish and ill-founded encomiums agreeable.

P O S T -

## P O S T S C R I P T.

I AM happy in being able to congratulate the Public, on the decrease of deaths, under the article of Small-Pox, in this last year, the number amounting only to 1425; an event which might have been in part expected from the great mortality of the preceding year; fewer subjects undoubtedly remaining liable to the disease. The numerous Inoculations lately practised in the adjacent counties, have also, probably, contributed their share to this desirable event. In page 125 of the Observations, I have given my reasons for supposing that, within the bills of mortality, the Small-Pox has attained its extent of mischief, and that the number of deaths by that disease would probably decline.

F I N I S.



